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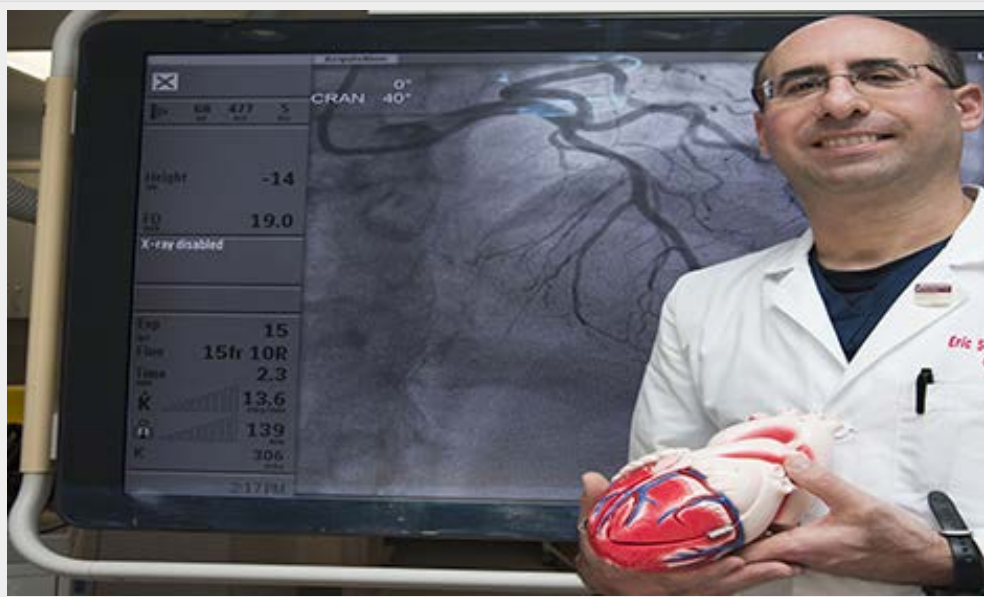
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Written on FEBRUARY 17, 2015 AT 8:00 AM by SVANDERWERFF

Inside Heart Health Month with Navy Medicine's Lead Cardiologist

Filed under FAMILIES, FLEET AND THE FLEET MARINE FORCE, FORCE HEALTH AND SAFETY (NO COMMENTS)



Don't become a heart health statistic. Know the risk factors and warning signs for a heart attack. Maintain a healthy diet and active lifestyle. Staying heart healthy is not an option, it's a top priority and the readiness of our Sailors and their families depends on it.

By Capt. Eric Schwartzman, U.S. Navy Specialty Leader for Cardiology and Director, Heart and Vascular Center, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth

The young active duty sailor was sitting on the gurney with a frightened and anxious look. The emergency room physician just informed him the chest pain he was experiencing was a heart attack. His first thoughts were to his young children and wife, and then he wondered how this was happening to him.

I met him in the middle of a choreographed dance of emergency room (ER) nurses and corpsmen preparing him for the cardiac catheterization laboratory. He told me he was 42 and had awoken with crushing chest pain in the center of his chest that was radiating into his left shoulder. He tried to walk it off but it only seemed to make it worse. His wife noticed he was sweaty and pale, and immediately called 9-1-1.

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He told me he was healthy with no medical problems and only smoked a few cigarettes a day. I explained to him that the only risk factor that many of our young heart attack patients have is tobacco use. We took him to the catheterization lab and found a 100% blockage in the main artery that runs down the front of his heart. A stent was placed in the artery restoring blood flow with immediate resolution of the chest pain.

I informed him he was lucky he came to the ER when he did. The vast majority of folks with that type of blockage – commonly referred to as the widow maker – die immediately. He spent the next two days on our telemetry floor and we had many conversations about coronary artery disease and how to prevent the development of new blockages and/or the progression of old ones.



The American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity at least five days per week for a total of 150 minutes, or 25 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity at least three days per week for 75 minutes.

We discussed keeping his blood pressure under control (less than 140/90 for males and females under 60 and less than 150/90 for males and females over 60), achieving an acceptable blood sugar (70-130 mg/dl before meals and less than 180 mg/dl 1-2 hours after a

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meal, and a hemoglobin A1C less than 7%), eating a healthy diet, exercising and most importantly quitting smoking. We talked about choosing lean meats and poultry without skin, eating fish at least two times per week, selecting fat-free, 1% fat or low fat dairy products, reducing saturated fat to no more than 5-6% of total calories, cutting back on beverages and foods with added sugars, drinking alcohol in moderation, and if blood pressure is an issue to eat no more than 2,400 mg of sodium per day.

He said that he tried to exercise regularly. I explained that the American Heart Association recommendation is 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity at least five days per week for a total of 150 minutes, or 25 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity at least three days per week for 75 minutes.

He was discharged three days after the heart attack with a new outlook on life and with the knowledge of how to prevent another heart attack. I recently saw him in the clinic six months after his heart attack. He is feeling wonderful, eating healthy, exercising regularly, and says that he hasn’t touched a cigarette since the heart attack.

This is just one story, yet the symptoms and repercussions are the same, if not worse, for many other heart patients each year. Don’t become a heart health statistic. Know the risk factors and warning signs for a heart attack. Maintain a healthy diet and active lifestyle. Staying heart healthy is not an option, it’s a top priority and the readiness of our Sailors, Marines and their families depends on it.

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